

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
IO-14 AID-05 HA-05 EUR-12 /101 W
-----112922 260929Z /11

R 260740Z OCT 78
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 711
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 8637

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, AF
SUBJECT: AFGHAN REGIME DISPLAYS NEW RED FLAG

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ON OCTOBER 19, MASSIVE PARADES WERE HELD IN CITIES THROUGHOUT THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN (DRA) IN CELEBRATION OF THE NEW NATIONAL FLAG (A SOVIET-STYLE, RED BANNER WITH A GOLD EMBLEM IN THE UPPER LEFT CORNER). KABUL'S DIPLOMATIC CORPS, WITH LITTLE ADVANCE NOTICE, WAS COMPELLED TO WATCH A SIX HALF-HOUR PARADE IN KABUL, LARGELY COMPRISED OF EUPHORIC PARTY MEMBERS AND DRAGOONED OFFICE WORKERS, AND STUDENTS. MILITARY UNITS WERE NOTICEABLY ABSENT IN THE PARADES IN KABUL AND JALALABAD, BUT WERE MAJOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE GHAZNI FESTIVITIES. THE AFGHAN LEADERSHIP VIEWED THE OCCASION AS A GIANT OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE THEIR APRIL 27 REVOLUTION. THE GENERAL MOOD OF THE SPECTATORS WAS ONE OF PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE RATHER THAN ENTHUSIASM. THERE WERE A FEW ANTI-AMERICAN CHANTS HEARD. END OF SUMMARY.

2. FLAG DAY, AS THE OCTOBER 19 HOLIDAY WAS NAMED, WAS
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AN INTERESTING DEMONSTRATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S POWER IN THE CITIES, HOW IT MOBILIZES SO-CALLED PUBLIC SUPPORT, AND ATTEMPTS TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF LEGITIMACY. IT WAS ALSO REVEALING IN TERMS OF THE INSECURITY THE REGIME APPEARS TO FEEL WITH RESPECT TO THE MILITARY.

3. ALTHOUGH THE PUBLIC HAD BEEN ALERTED FOR MORE THAN A WEEK THAT THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW NATIONAL FLAG WAS IN THE OFFING, THE ACTUAL DATE FOR THE NATIONWIDE CELEBRATION WAS KEPT A SECRET UNTIL 36 HOURS BEFORE THE DATE CHOSEN: OCTOBER 19. FURTHERMORE, THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS WAS NOT NOTIFIED OF ITS BEING REQUIRED TO ATTEND THE KABUL CELEBRATION UNTIL 4:00 P.M. THE PRECEDING AFTERNOON. THE REASON FOR THE SECRECY, IN THE OPINION OF MOST DIPLOMATS, WAS THE REGIME'S FEELINGS OF INSECURITY. ACCORDING TO REPORTS RECEIVED BY SOME EMBASSIES, THE UNDERGROUND MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD (IKHWAN-I-MUSLIMIN) HAD WARNED THAT IT PLANNED TO DISRUPT FLAG DAY, AND PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THIS THE DRA DELAYED THE ANNOUNCEMENT UNTIL THE LAST FEASIBLE MOMENT. ON THE MORNING OF THE PARADE ALL VEHICLE TRAFFIC WAS PROHIBITED IN KABUL, AND THE CITIZENS WERE ORDERED TO REMAIN IN THEIR OWN BOROUGHES. AS IT TURNED OUT, THERE WAS NO VISIBLE DISRUPTION ANYWHERE IN AFGHANISTAN.

4. THE NIGHT BEFORE THE KABUL PARADE, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT ONE MILLION PEOPLE FROM KABUL AND NEIGHBORING TOWNS WOULD LIKELY PARTICIPATE IN THE WALK PAST. (KABUL'S POPULATION IS OFFICIALLY ESTIMATED AT 600,000, BUT 400,000 IS PROBABLY A MORE ACCURATE FIGURE. ACCORDING TO THE DRA'S OWN STATISTICS, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE COUNTRY'S TOTAL POPULATION IS SLIGHTLY OVER 15,000,000.) AFTER THE PARADE, THIS SAME INFLATED FIGURE WAS CLAIMED BY THE GOVERNMENT AS HAVING MARCHED. THIS WAS BALDERDASH. MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS CAREFULLY ESTIMATED THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE PASSING, AND CAME UP WITH A MAXIMUM ESTIMATE OF 50 PERSONS EVERY MINUTE, WHICH BRINGS THE TOTAL TO AT MOST 20,000.

5. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, MANY PEOPLE MARCHED INVOLUNTARILY. POLICEMEN CAME TO THE RESIDENCES OF THE DCM AND AT LEAST ONE OTHER EMBASSY OFFICER THE NIGHT BEFORE, ORDERING THE HOUSE SERVANTS TO MARCH. (THEY DID.) SCHOOL CHILDREN AND OFFICE WORKERS WERE SIMILARLY ORDERED TO DEMONSTRATE, AND SOME PUPILS WERE WARNED THAT IF THEY DID NOT THEY WOULD HAVE TO REPEAT A YEAR OF SCHOOL. SOME SHOPKEEPERS IN KABUL WERE ORDERED TO CLOSE THEIR SHOPS IN THE MORNING OR ELSE BE FINED AFS. 2000 (\$50 US). WHEN THE GROUPS REACHED THE PALACE PODIUM, INEVITABLY IT WAS THE ACCOMPANYING KHALQI PARTY MEMBERS, SPORTING RED ARM BANDS AND SASHES, WHO EXORTED THE GROUPS TO WAVE THEIR RED FLAGS AND SCREAM GREETINGS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 8637

6. PRESIDENT NOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI HIMSELF RAISED THE NEW SCARLET NATIONAL FLAG IN A BRIEF CEREMONY PRIOR TO THE PARADE. THEN, ALONG WITH FELLOW POLITIBURO MEMBERS AND HO TAM, THE VISITING NORTH KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER, HE STOOD ON THE PODIUM FOR AN EXHAUSTING SIX AND ONE HALF STRAIGHT HOURS, SALUTING THE PARADERS AND WAIVING A LITTLE PAPER FLAG. THE NEW FLAG IS RED, AND, LIKE THE SOVIET FLAG, HAS A GOLDEN DEVICE IN THE UPPER LEFT CORNER CONSISTING OF THE ARABIC WORD "KHALQ" ("MASSES"), FRAMED BY WHEAT STALKS AND TOPPED BY A STAR. AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WREATH ARE WRITTEN -- IN THE PUSHTU LANGUAGE -- "DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN" AND "SAUR REVOLUTION OF 1357."

7. NOTWITHSTANDING THE COMPULSORY ASPECTS OF THE FESTIVITIES, IT DID REPRESENT AN IMPRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT BY THE KHALQ PARTY. THERE WERE FEW GAPS BETWEEN THE GROUPS MARCHING PAST, AND ALL GROUPS SPORTED NUMEROUS RED BANNERS, PAPER FLAGS, PICTURES OF AFGHANS BURSTING THEIR CHAINS, AND PORTRAITS OF PRESIDENT TARAKI, WHO IS ALREADY THE SUBJECT OF A MASSIVE "CULT OF THE
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PERSONALITY." ALSO NOTICEABLE IN THE PARADE WAS THE FRENETIC ENTHUSIASM OF THE REDBANDED PARTY MEMBERS -- MANY OF THEM SEEMINGLY IN THEIR TEENS, TWENTIES, AND THIRTIES. IN FRONT OF THE PODIUM, THEY OFTEN ACTED LIKE ZEALOTS, DANCING AND SCREAMING WITH ALMOST RELIGIOUS FERVOR. TO THOSE KHALQI LEADERS STANDING ON THE POLITBURO PODIUM, IT MUST HAVE BEEN MOST EGO SATISFYING.

8. ALTHOUGH NO ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA WAS NOTED IN THE MAIN PARADE AREA, ORGANIZED MARCHING UNITS PASSING OUR EMBASSY TOWARDS THE PALACE, CHANTED, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THEIR RED-ARMBANDED ESCORTS, SUCH PHRASES AS "SEFARAT-I-SIA" (WHICH COULD BE TRANSLATED EITHER AS "BLACK EMBASSY" OR "CIA EMBASSY") AND "EMBASSY OF IMPERIALISM".

9. CONSPICUOUSLY MISSING FROM AT LEAST THE KABUL AND JALALABAD PARADES WAS THE MILITARY. HOWEVER, IN GHAZNI, TRAVELLING EMBASSY OFFICERS NOTICED THAT ARMED MILITARY UNITS DID PARTICIPATE EXTENSIVELY. THE ONLY MILITARY ELEMENTS THAT PARTICIPATED IN KABUL WERE SOME FYL-BYS BY NINE AIR FORCE SU-7S AND APPROXIMATELY SIX HELICOPTERS, AND, AT THE END OF THE PARADE, A MARCH PAST BY STUDENTS FROM THE MILITARY HIGH SCHOOL AND MILITARY ACADEMY -- BUT WITHOUT ARMS.

10. COMMENT: THE SUCCESSFUL HOISTING OF THEIR RED FLAG HAS GIVEN THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP A POWERFUL PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST, AND CREATED THE PUBLIC IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE IN EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF THIS COUNTRY.
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